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| |  | | --- | | **Selected Poetry of Langston Hughes**  **Dinner Guest: Me** | |  | |  |
| |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | I know I am The Negro Problem Being wined and dined, Answering the usual questions That come to white mind Which seeks demurely To Probe in polite way The why and wherewithal Of darkness U.S.A.-- Wondering how things got this way In current democratic night, Murmuring gently Over fraises du bois, "I'm so ashamed of being white."  The lobster is delicious, The wine divine, And center of attention At the damask table, mine. To be a Problem on Park Avenue at eight Is not so bad. Solutions to the Problem, Of course, wait.   Langston Hughes | |

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| |  | | --- | | **Mother to** [**Son**](http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/mother-to-son/) | |  |
| |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | Well, son, I'll tell you: Life for me ain't been no crystal stair. It's had tacks in it, And splinters, And boards torn up, And places with no carpet on the floor— Bare. But all the time  I'se been a-climbin' on, And reachin' landin's, And turnin' corners, And sometimes goin' in the dark Where there ain't been no light. So, boy, don't you turn back. Don't you set down on the steps. 'Cause you finds it's kinder hard. Don't you fall now— For I'se still goin', honey, I'se still climbin', And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.   Langston Hughes | |

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| |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | Let America be America again. Let it be the dream it used to be. Let it be the pioneer on the plain Seeking a home where he himself is free. (America never was America to me.)  Let America be the dream the dreamers dreamed-- Let it be that great strong land of love Where never kings connive nor tyrants scheme That any man be crushed by one above.  (It never was America to me.)  O, let my land be a land where Liberty Is crowned with no false patriotic wreath, But opportunity is real, and life is free, Equality is in the air we breathe.  (There's never been equality for me, Nor freedom in this "homeland of the free.")  Say, who are you that mumbles in the dark?  And who are you that draws your veil across the stars?  I am the poor white, fooled and pushed apart, I am the Negro bearing slavery's scars. I am the red man driven from the land, I am the [immigrant](http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/let-america-be-america-again/) clutching the hope I seek-- And finding only the same old stupid plan Of dog eat dog, of mighty crush the weak.  I am the young man, full of strength and hope, Tangled in that ancient endless chain Of profit, power, gain, of grab the land! Of grab the gold! Of grab the ways of satisfying need! Of work the men! Of take the pay! Of owning everything for one's own greed!  I am the farmer, bondsman to the soil. I am the worker sold to the machine. I am the Negro, servant to you all. I am the people, humble, hungry, mean-- Hungry yet today despite the dream. Beaten yet today--O, Pioneers! I am the man who never got ahead, The poorest worker bartered through the years.  Yet I'm the one who dreamt our basic dream In the Old World while still a serf of kings, Who dreamt a dream so strong, so brave, so true, That even yet its mighty daring sings In every brick and stone, in every furrow turned That's made America the land it has become. O, I'm the man who sailed those early seas In search of what I meant to be my home-- For I'm the one who left dark Ireland's shore, And Poland's plain, and England's grassy lea, And torn from Black Africa's strand I came To build a "homeland of the free." The free?  Who said the free? Not me? Surely not me? The millions on relief today? The millions shot down when we strike? The millions who have nothing for our pay? For all the dreams we've dreamed And all the songs we've sung And all the hopes we've held And all the flags we've hung, The millions who have nothing for our pay-- Except the dream that's almost dead today.  O, let America be America again-- The land that never has been yet-- And yet must be--the land where every man is free. The land that's mine--the poor man's, Indian's, Negro's, ME-- Who made America, Whose sweat and blood, whose faith and pain, Whose hand at the foundry, whose plow in the rain, Must bring back our mighty dream again.  Sure, call me any ugly name you choose-- The steel of freedom does not stain. From those who live like leeches on the people's lives, We must take back our land again, America!  O, yes, I say it plain, America never was America to me, And yet I swear this oath-- America will be!  Out of the rack and ruin of our gangster death, The rape and rot of graft, and stealth, and lies, We, the people, must redeem The land, the mines, the plants, the rivers. The mountains and the endless plain-- All, all the stretch of these great green states-- And make America again! | |

**The Bitter River**

(Dedicated to the memory of Charlie Lang and Ernest Green, each fourteen years old when lynched together beneath the Shubuta Bridge over the Chicasawhay River in Mississippi, October 12th, i942.)

There is a bitter river   
Flowing through the South.   
Too long has the taste of its water Been in my mouth.   
There is a bitter river Dark with filth and mud.   
Too long has its evil poison   
Poisoned my blood.

I've drunk of the bitter river   
And its gall coats the red of my tongue,   
Mixed with the blood of the lynched boys   
From its iron bridge hung,   
Mixed with the hopes that are drowned there   
In the snake-like hiss of its stream   
Where I drank of the bitter river   
That strangled my dream:   
The book studied-but useless,   
Tool handled-but unused,   
Knowledge acquired but thrown away,   
Ambition battered and bruised.   
Oh, water of the bitter river   
With your taste of blood and clay,   
You reflect no stars by night,   
No sun by day.

The bitter river reflects no stars-   
It gives back only the glint of steel bars   
And dark bitter faces behind steel bars:   
The Scottsboro boys behind steel bars,   
Lewis Jones behind steel bars,   
The voteless share-cropper behind steel bars,   
The labor leader behind steel bars,   
The soldier thrown from a Jim Crow bus behind steel bars,   
The 150 mugger behind steel bars,   
The girl who sells her body behind steel bars,   
And my grandfather's back with its ladder of scars   
Long ago, long ago-the whip and steel bars -   
The bitter river reflects no stars.

"Wait, be patient," you say.   
"Your folks will have a better day."   
But the swirl of the bitter river   
Takes your words away.   
"Work, education, patience   
Will bring a better day-"   
The swirl of the bitter river   
Carries your "patience" away.   
"Disrupter!  Agitator!   
Trouble maker!"you say.

The swirl of the bitter river   
Sweeps your lies away.   
I did not ask for this river   
Nor the taste of its bitter brew.   
I was given its water   
As a gift from you.   
Yours has been the power   
To force my back to the wall   
And make me drink of the bitter cup   
Mixed with blood and gall.

You have lynched my comrades   
Where the iron bridge crosses the stream,   
Underpaid me for my labor,   
And spit in the face of my dream.   
You forced me to the bitter river   
With the hiss of its snake-like song-   
Now your words no longer have meaning-   
I have drunk at the river too long:   
Dreamer of dreams to be broken,   
Builder of hopes to be smashed,   
Loser from an empty pocket   
Of my meager cash,   
Bitter bearer of burdens   
And singer of weary song,   
I've drunk at the bitter river   
With its filth and its mud too long.   
Tired now of the bitter river,   
Tired now of the pat on the back,   
Tired now of the steel bars   
Because my face is black,   
I'm tired of segregation,   
Tired of filth and mud,   
I've drunk of the bitter river   
And it's turned to steel in my blood.

Oh, tragic bitter river   
Where the lynched boys hung,   
The gall of your bitter water   
Coats my tongue.   
The blood of your bitter water   
For me gives back no stars.   
I'm tired of the bitter river!   
Tired of the bars!